



To print: Select **File** and then **Print** from your browser's menu

---

This story was printed from [News](#),  
located at <http://www.greenbiz.com/news/>.

---

## The Benefits of Commuter Choice: U.S. EPA's Best Workplaces for Commuters

Source [GreenBiz.com](#)

URL:

*This month, for Earth Day, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Transportation and Air Quality has two wishes: The first is for more companies to start offering commuter benefits; the second is for more employees to ask for those benefits. By Denise Kearns*

---

Commuters are spending more time on the road, stuck in traffic, unnecessarily burning fuel and emitting pollutants than ever before. In fact, the number of miles Americans drive has tripled since 1970, to over three trillion miles per year, and projections are that this number will continue to grow by about 2% per year. At the same time the average commuter wastes roughly 47 hours each year in traffic. All told, our cars burn about 3.5 million barrels of oil per day, and emit more than a billion metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually (2002).

These trends affect not only the environment, they are increasingly a national security concern. They also are known to influence employee stress and workplace productivity.

Partners in the Environmental Protection Agency's [Best Workplaces for Commuters](#) program are helping to turn these trends around, however. Through this EPA and U.S. Department of Transportation-sponsored program, businesses and other employers that offer commuter benefits that meet a National Standard of Excellence receive technical support and national recognition. More than 1,500 employers nationwide are already participating in EPA's Best Workplaces for Commuters program, offering benefits such as subsidized transit or vanpool passes, and telework options, to more than 3 million employees.

Recent EPA survey data show that when offered high-quality commuter benefits, employees are 20% more likely to commute to work by a means other than driving alone than those not offered the benefits.

Data from the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) also show that interest in commuter benefits rose dramatically since late 2005, when gas prices reached \$3.00 a gallon or more in certain parts of the country.

These conditions have created an excellent opportunity for companies to establish commuter benefit programs—and to partner with EPA as one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters. Employers already participating in the program attest that commuter benefits make a huge difference to their employees, the environment, and ultimately their bottom line.

Pitney Bowes, for example, of Stamford, Conn., is a long-standing recognized leader in commuter services and traffic reduction. The company offers a broad range of commute options to its 4,150 Stamford and other Connecticut worksite employees for a number of reasons:

- Enhanced employee effectiveness (due to reduced stress, fatigue, time and costs associated with commuting to and from work)
- Reduced fuel consumption and improved air quality for community and future generations
- Expanded recruitment radius and increased applicant-pool for potential workforce
- Greater housing and community choices for employees
- Reduced single-occupancy vehicles, traffic congestion, and highway maintenance costs for taxpayers

On any given workday, more than 400 riders take advantage of a shuttle service Pitney Bowes provides between its facilities and the Stamford MetroNorth Train Station. Pitney Bowes has provided the shuttle service for nearly 10 years and recently added a third shuttle and extended its service hours to keep up with demand. The company also was the first corporation in the area to offer the "Deduct-A-Ride" pretax commute account in 1999. Since the program first became available, employees have exceeded \$3.5 million in their pre-tax commute accounts. Currently, more than 1,100 employees are enrolled in the program, and saving significantly on their annual commute costs. Pitney Bowes' program has been used as a model in a statewide training program for other employers interested in offering pre-tax commuter benefits.

Including its shuttle service, and all administrative costs associated with the pre-tax commuting program and other benefits, Pitney Bowes estimates that in 2005, it invested nearly \$300,000 in its commuter benefits program. The benefits the company accrues as a result of this investment are well worth the costs, according to Ed Houghton, Director, Workforce Effectiveness and Transition Services.

"Pitney Bowes is proud to be one of EPA's Best Workplaces for Commuters," said Houghton. "We have developed and provide innovative solutions which include commute options, flexibility and on-site services to help our workforce achieve greater work/life balance and maximize their effectiveness. We recognize that by investing in and providing a broad range of convenient, flexible and affordable alternatives to driving alone to work, Pitney Bowes enhances our shareholder value through increased

productivity and loyalty; improves the quality of life for our workforce and reduces their commuting costs.

"Equally important, we benefit our communities and environment by reducing emissions and energy consumption and decreasing the demands on our infrastructure."

Hewlett-Packard of Palo Alto, Calif., is another Best Workplaces for Commuters employer. Currently 15 sites offer programs that meet the programs National Standard of Excellence and include 46% of Hewlett-Packard's U.S.-based workforce.

For example, Hewlett-Packard's offices in the Atlanta, Ga., area subsidize vanpool expenses beyond the cost of gas and offer their employees \$40 in monthly transit subsidies. The Atlanta worksite collaborates with the Perimeter Transportation Coalition to address regional air quality and transportation concerns and participates in a "Commuter Reward Program," rewarding non-drive-alone commuters with gift certificates to local merchants. Other Hewlett-Packard sites participate in similar community programs and activities.

"We view alternate commute programs as an employee benefit and a corporate responsibility," Daryl Wilmeth, HP environmental program manager for the Americas said in a statement. "Employees who use them tell us they feel healthier, and are more productive and less stressed at the job. That's a win for everyone."

For Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., another benefit of partnering with EPA as one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters has been the opportunity to share its experiences with other universities and business organizations. Cornell wants other organizations to understand cost savings and other advantages of offering commuter benefits. Through its commuter benefits program, launched 15 years ago, the university estimates that it has saved more than \$40 million in net costs. These savings are largely due to Cornell's decision to invest in commuter benefits for its 9,000 faculty and staff, rather than build new parking structures.

To accomplish its goals, Cornell raised its parking fees and began offering attractive transit and carpooling incentives to faculty and staff. Today, these benefits include transit passes valued at approximately \$45 per month, which give Cornell staff and faculty who use transit for commuting purposes, free, unlimited use of a county-wide bus system, which includes on-campus routes, and a shuttle that runs between campus and downtown Ithaca. The university also offers a host of other commuter benefits, including rideshare/carpool matching services, an emergency ride program, and a pre-tax benefit program that helps employees lower their commute costs.

Cornell estimates that through its commuter benefits program it has been able to reduce employee parking requirements by approximately 2,200 parking spaces. In addition to saving on parking construction and maintenance, Cornell notes that employees drive about 10 million miles less each year, generating important air quality benefits and significantly reducing traffic congestion on and around campus. These benefits also have contributed positively to the university's community relations.

"Being a part of EPA's Best Workplaces for Commuters offers us a good opportunity to tell our story," said David Lieb, assistant director of Cornell Transportation Services. "Outreach, a shift in attitudes, and

an inclusive effort are needed to start up a commuter benefits program. It's important for our peers and the business community, however, to know that these kinds of benefits can provide significant returns. These include cost savings, and the opportunity to demonstrate your leadership in a number of important areas, including community relations, environmental stewardship, and in valuing your human resources."

To learn more about Best Workplaces for Commuters, visit the program [Web site](#) or contact Susan Bullard, 202-343-9856.

-----  
*Denise Kearns is an environmental protection specialist at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.*

[Back to "news section"](#)